



WHAT ARE THE HARDEST LANGUAGES TO LEARN?

A look at which languages are easiest and most difficult for English speakers to pick up.



THE FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE COMPILES LEARNING EXPECTATIONS FOR MANY LANGUAGES BASED ON THE AMOUNT OF TIME IT TAKES A NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKER TO ACHIEVE SPEAKING AND READING PROFICIENCY.

Each Learner Is Different

The time it takes to learn a language depends on a number of factors:

- How close the new language is to your native language or other languages you know
- How complex the language is
- How many hours each week you devote to learning the language
- The language learning resources available to you
- Your motivation

Easy

Languages Closely Related to English

To achieve language proficiency...



23-24 weeks



575-600 class hours

Spanish
Español



32.9m

Portuguese
Português



17.8m

French
Français



67.8m

Italian
Italiano



61.7m

Romanian
Română



23.4m

Dutch
Nederlands



21.7m

Swedish
Svenska



8.3m

Afrikaans
Afrikaans



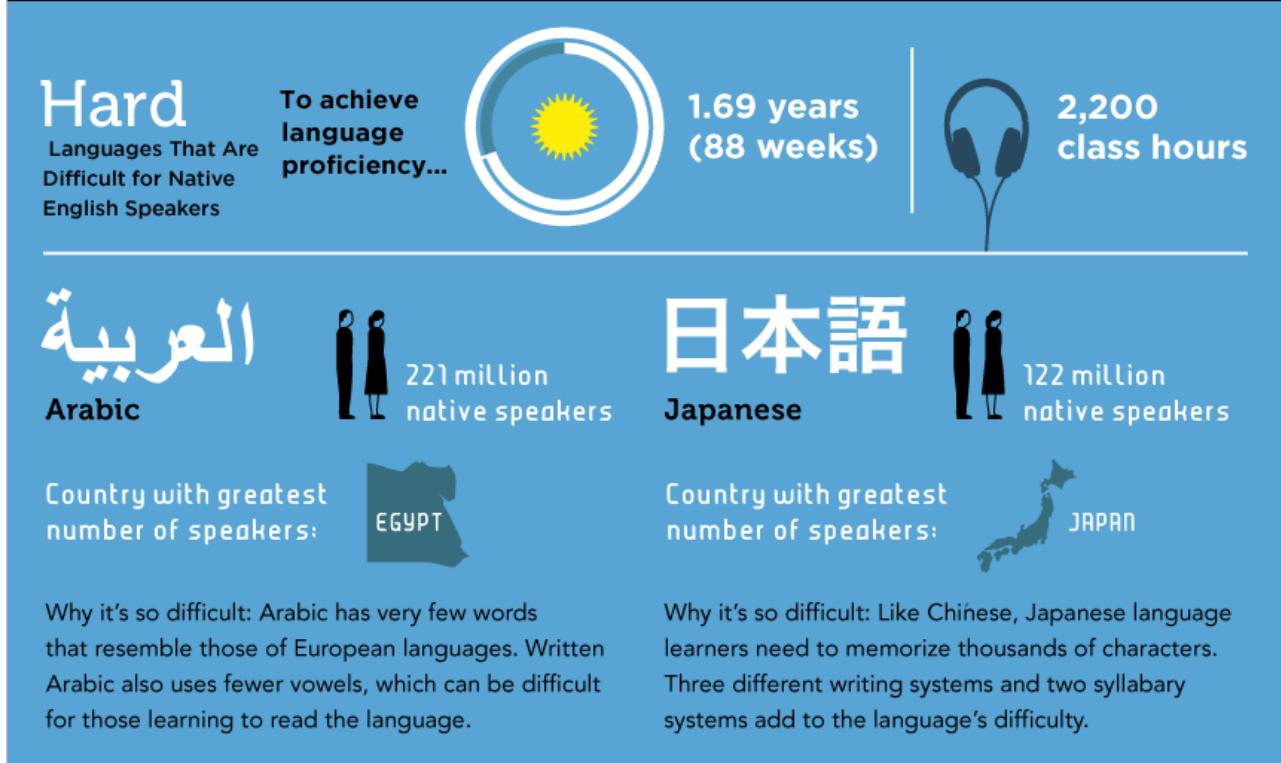
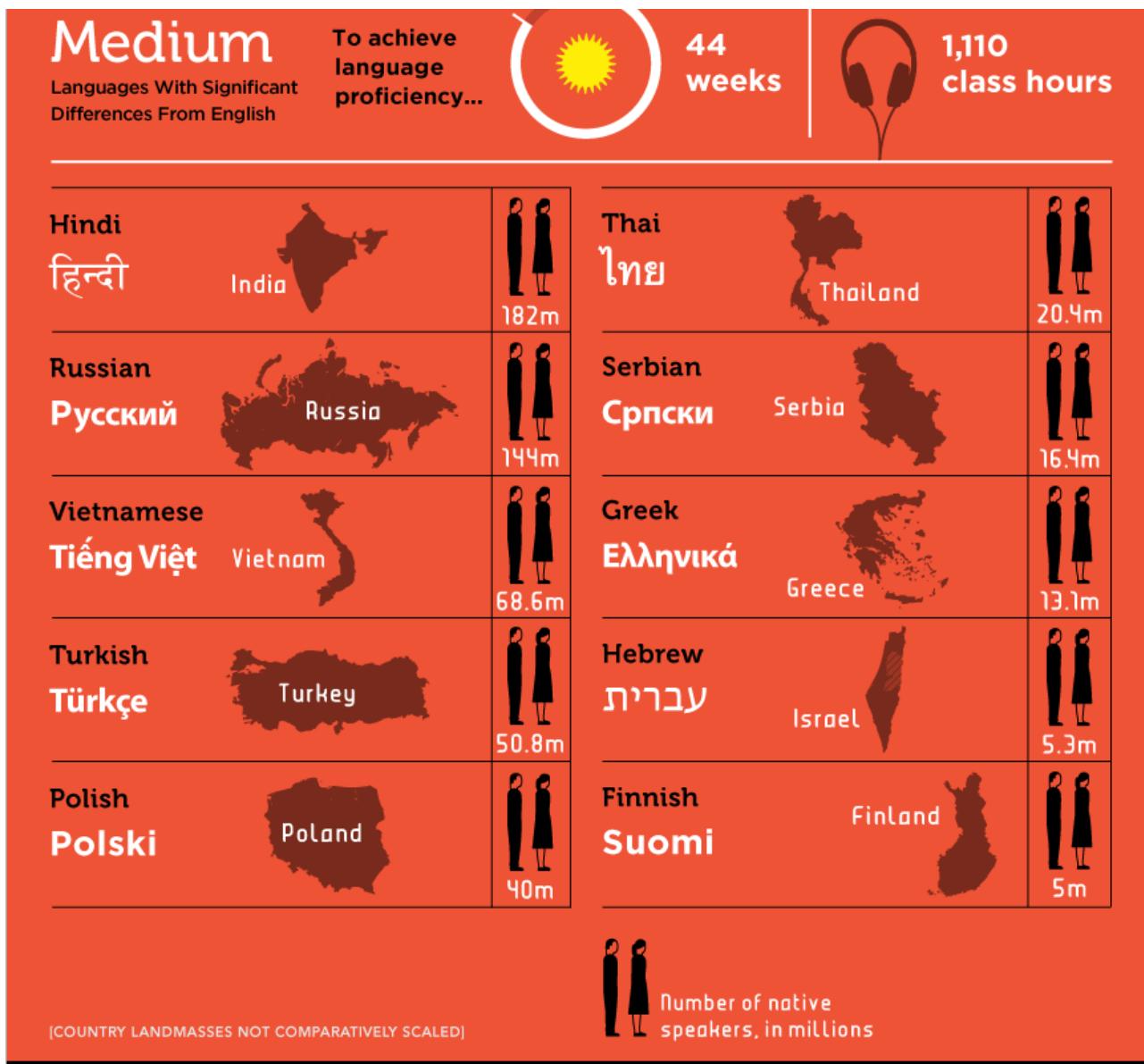
4.9m

Norwegian
Norsk



4.6m

Number of native speakers, in millions



中文

Chinese

1.2 billion
native speakersCountry with greatest
number of speakers:

Why it's so difficult: Chinese is a tonal language, in which meaning changes as you change the tone of a word. Plus, thousands of characters and a complex writing system make learning Chinese a formidable task.

한국어

Korean

66.3 million
native speakersCountry with greatest
number of speakers:

SOUTH KOREA

Why it's so difficult: Different sentence structure, syntax, and verb conjugations make learning Korean difficult for native English speakers. Written Korean also relies on many Chinese characters.

SOURCES: Interagency Language Roundtable, Al-Bab.com, MyLanguages.org, Google Translate, Ethnologue.com, Foreign Service Institute, Wikipedia